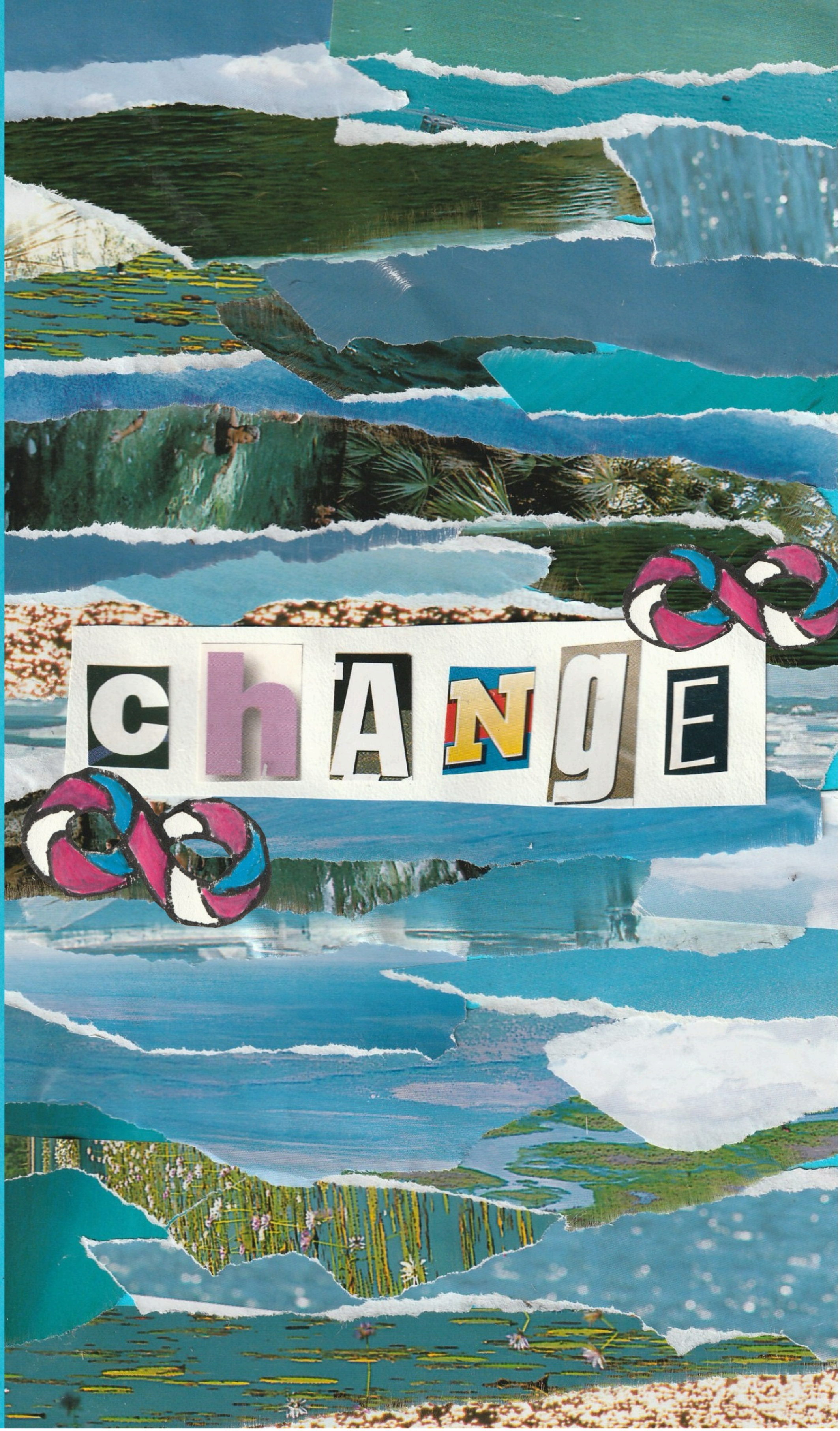
gender

mobility



LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This zine was created on the lands of the Gadigal, Bunurong/Boon Wurrung, Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung, Yalukit-Willam, Turrbal and Jabera peoples. Sovereignty on this land was never ceded.

Always was always will be Aboriginal land

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A special thank you to the focus group who made this zine possible and without their valued input would not exist.

We, the team behind genderbility recognise the access issues in version 1 and are actively trying to make this work more accessible for all and especially aiming to centre **MSN, HSN** and intellectually disabled voices going forward.

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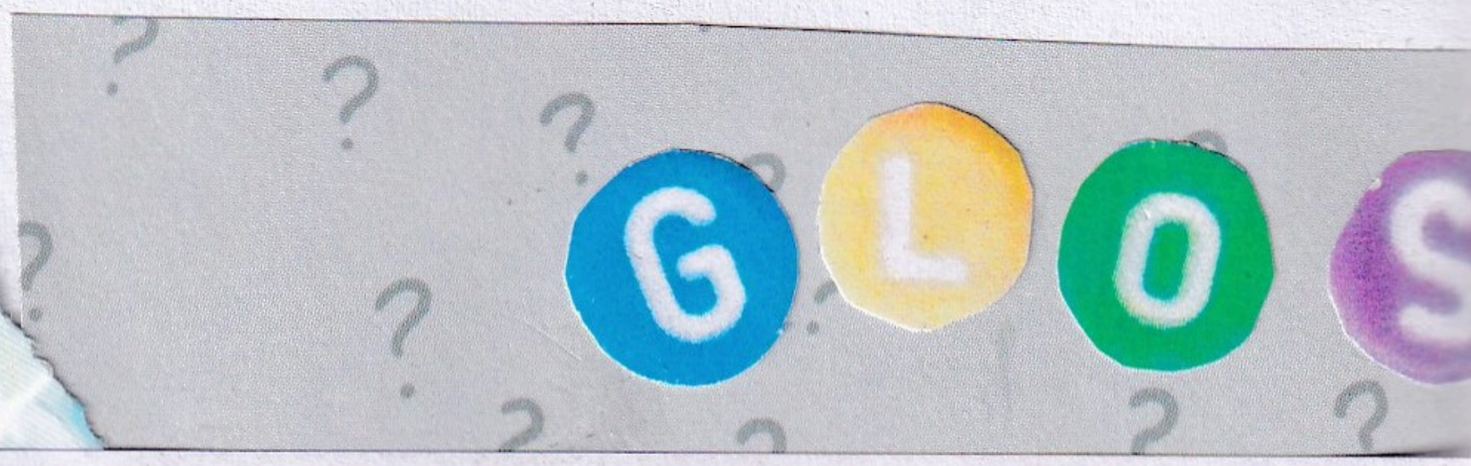


Allistic: Non-autistic

Neurodivergent: Describes those whose brains function in a different way than is expected by society. Can refer to those with developmental, intellectual, or learning disabilities, as well as those with medical conditions or mental health conditions

Gender-diverse: When a person's gender identity or expression is different from the norms that are expected of their sex assigned at birth

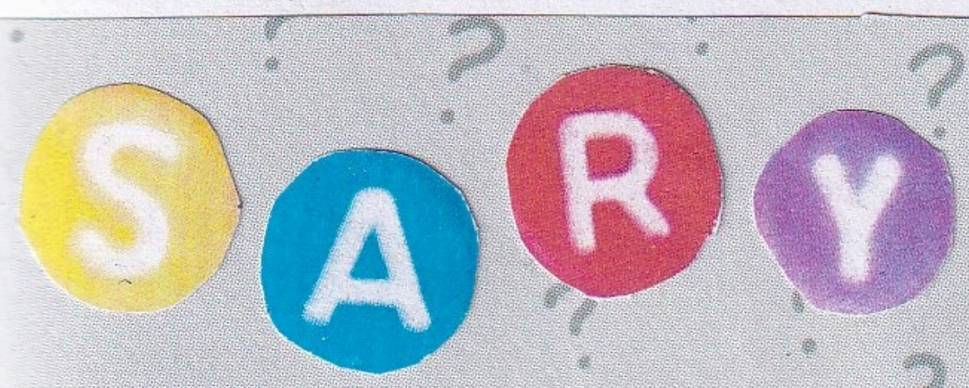
Transgender - An umbrella term to describe those who identify as a different gender than the one that they were assigned at birth.

Binding: Compressing the chest area to make it appear flatter and more masculine

Tucking: A process where an individual's testicles and penis are pushed towards the pack of the body. The genitals are secured with underwear or tape. This process creates a more feminine appearance in the crotch area.

Bottom surgery: A surgery used to change one's genitals, from either vagina-to-penis or penis-to-vagina, to have both a penis and vagina, or to remove testicles.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT): Taking hormones and/or blocking existing hormones



Packing: Creating a bulge in the crotch area to create the appearance of a penis. This may be done using a prosthetic penis or with padding

Social transition: The changes that an individual engages in to make their social life along with their gender identity. This may include changing pronouns or how you dress

Top surgery: A surgery used to make the chest appear e more masculine or feminine. For a masculine appearance, breast tissue is removed and the nipples are reshaped. For a feminine appearance, gel or an implant is placed behind the breast tissue or the pectoral muscle.

Sensory Processing: How your nervous system organises and reacts to their physical environment

Medical transition: Undergoing HRT or surgery to align with your gender identity

Meltdowns: intense, external and involuntary reactions to overwhelm

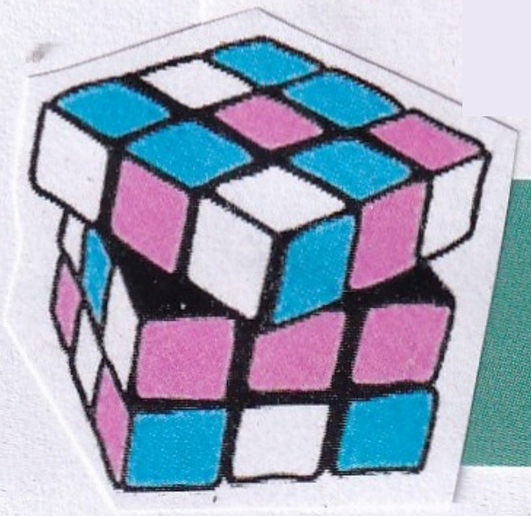
Shutdowns: Intense internalised reactions to overwhelm

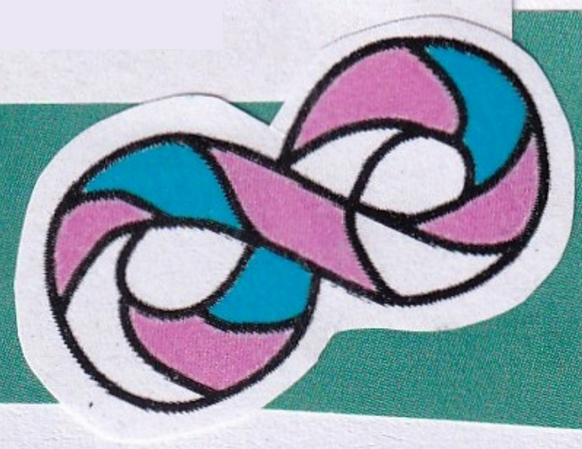
I've always struggled with change. I remember the three day meltdown that I had because a small pile of my belongings was moved into the cupboard without me being told. Or when I had to take the night off because the app that I used to do my uni notes changed its layout unexpectedly. Even changes that are universally seen as positive are really hard for me to deal with.

Transitioning (in reference to gender transition) comes with a lot of change. This is something that can be really difficult for Autistic people. It can summon complicated feelings - if I'm excited to transition, why am I anxious about it? This is a totally normal experience as it can be difficult to balance a need for consistency with the desire for gender euphoria in transitioning.

One individual from our discussion group highlighted how, whilst they were excited about transitioning, they still found the changing aspects distressing.

- *"Even in my transition, I was like "ok, here's my linear plan for everything I want to happen for the next 5 years and if it doesn't happen, I'm going to cry!" I've basically spent my entire life doing that, like I know what I'm gonna be doing in 10 years time."*





When I started transitioning, as much as I was happy about it, it came with a lot of adjustment. I had a new name and new clothes, which I was excited about, but it was still something new to get used to. When I started medically transitioning, I had to learn new things and suddenly I started looking different and being treated differently. I was hungry all the time, I sweated more and my hair was greasy - my body looked and behaved differently than I was used to. These were all things that I loved about my transition, but I also had to majorly modify my routine to adjust.

As Autistic people, we find a lot of comfort in routine. It provides a sense of comfort and predictability when the world is often unpredictable. When faced with disruption to our routine or set plans, it may result in meltdowns, shutdowns or self-injurious behaviours. These reactions are a result of the heightened anxiety these changes bring out, or difficulty communicating or understanding emotions and desires that are associated with the change. These experiences can be extremely distressing, which may result in Autistic individuals going out of their way to actively avoid change, even when it is positive.

There is no universally agreed upon reason as to why change is challenging for Autistic individuals. One of the speculated explanations is due to sensory processing. Autistic people tend to be hyper (over) or hypo (under) sensitive to sensory input. This can result in sensory overload, as it can impact one's ability to process the sensations that come along with change. Subsequently, we may try to control the environment or circumstances by clinging to routines or limiting spontaneity to prevent experiencing distress. Changes also often create new social expectations, which can be hard to adjust to as Autistic individuals. When these expectations are not properly communicated, it can further lead to distress, making the change even harder to deal with.

"Reality to an autistic person is a confusing, interacting mass of events, people, places, sounds and sights... Set routines, times, particular routes and rituals all help to get order into an unbearably chaotic life. Trying to keep everything the same reduces some of the terrible fear."
Jolliffe (1992) in Howlin (2004), p.137.

Transitioning, in many ways, can feel like an interference to what we are used to and our routines. While transitioning for gender-diverse individuals is inherently positive (for those who wish to socially or medically transition), it can be stressful to consider all the changes it can bring. Transitioning in itself is a process of changes that allow you to live in your gender identity - some of the changes you may experience or engage in include:[20]

Social[21]

- Changing your wardrobe
- Packing *
- Binding *
- Tucking *
- Changing your name
- Changing your pronouns
- Formally changing your legal documents
- Others may perceive you differently; you may experience different gendered expectations

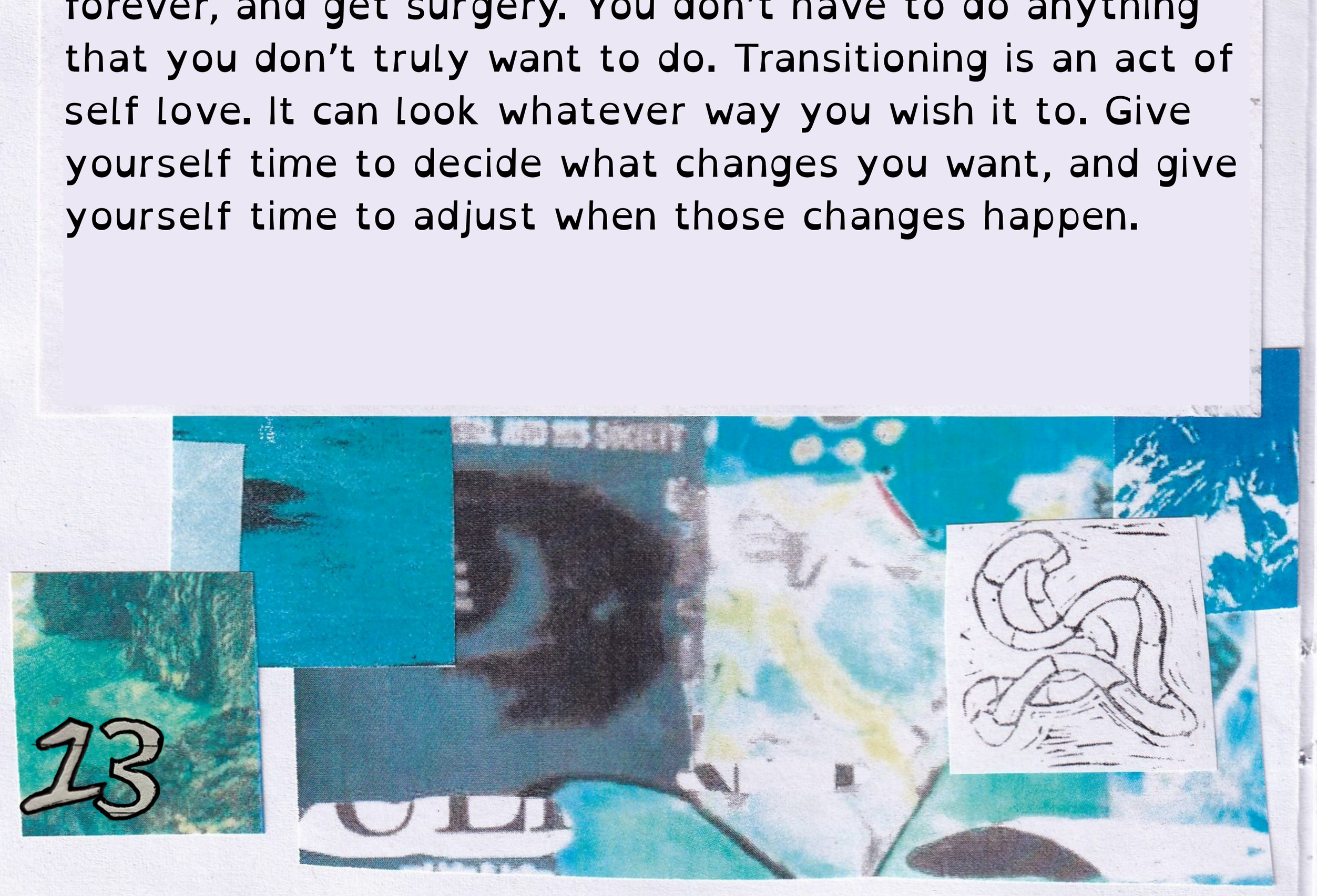
Medical[22]

- Medical
- Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) *
- Top surgery *
- Bottom surgery *
- Facial feminisation or masculinisation surgery *
- Fertility preservation
- Hair removal
- Speech Therapy

Transitioning can occur in a long or short period of time, but ultimately, the changes that you undergo are entirely up to you. Transitioning is a very individual process, and whether you do or don't pursue certain pathways doesn't make your experience any less valid.

Transitioning is also a very internal process. Adjusting to different gender expressions and expectations may alter how you perceive yourself. This can take a while and that's okay, no one's process is linear or uncomplicated. I know for myself, my journey with hormone replacement therapy (HRT) has looked very different than most: I started with a low dose of T-gel, slowly increasing it across several years, then switched to shots, then back to gel again, then back to shots. Some of these options I chose, and others were due to circumstance. You are allowed to enact your transition in whatever way feels right to you.

Often it feels like we are expected to go about our transition in a linear way. The narrative seems to be that you change your name, go on hormones and stay on them forever, and get surgery. You don't have to do anything that you don't truly want to do. Transitioning is an act of self love. It can look whatever way you wish it to. Give yourself time to decide what changes you want, and give yourself time to adjust when those changes happen.



The autistic experience in relation to gender can vary significantly from our allistic counterparts. This means that our gender experiences are often more fluid or complex, as shown below in the examples from our discussion group, who described their experiences with gender expression and change:

- *"[My gender is] actually fluctuating between everything all the time, and my existence is change. I think it took me such a long time to come to terms with that because I don't like change. I find it very abrupt and jarring, but to come to terms with the fact that my entire existence is fluid and constantly fluctuating between two polar sides of a spectrum - of all spectrums!"*
- *"My gender is a lot more fluid than [binary gender] and I kind of just pretend that it's not, because I hate change, and so I'm like - no, I'm a man...even though that's genuinely not the case, because change sucks and I don't like it. So I just pretend it doesn't exist, which you shouldn't do."*

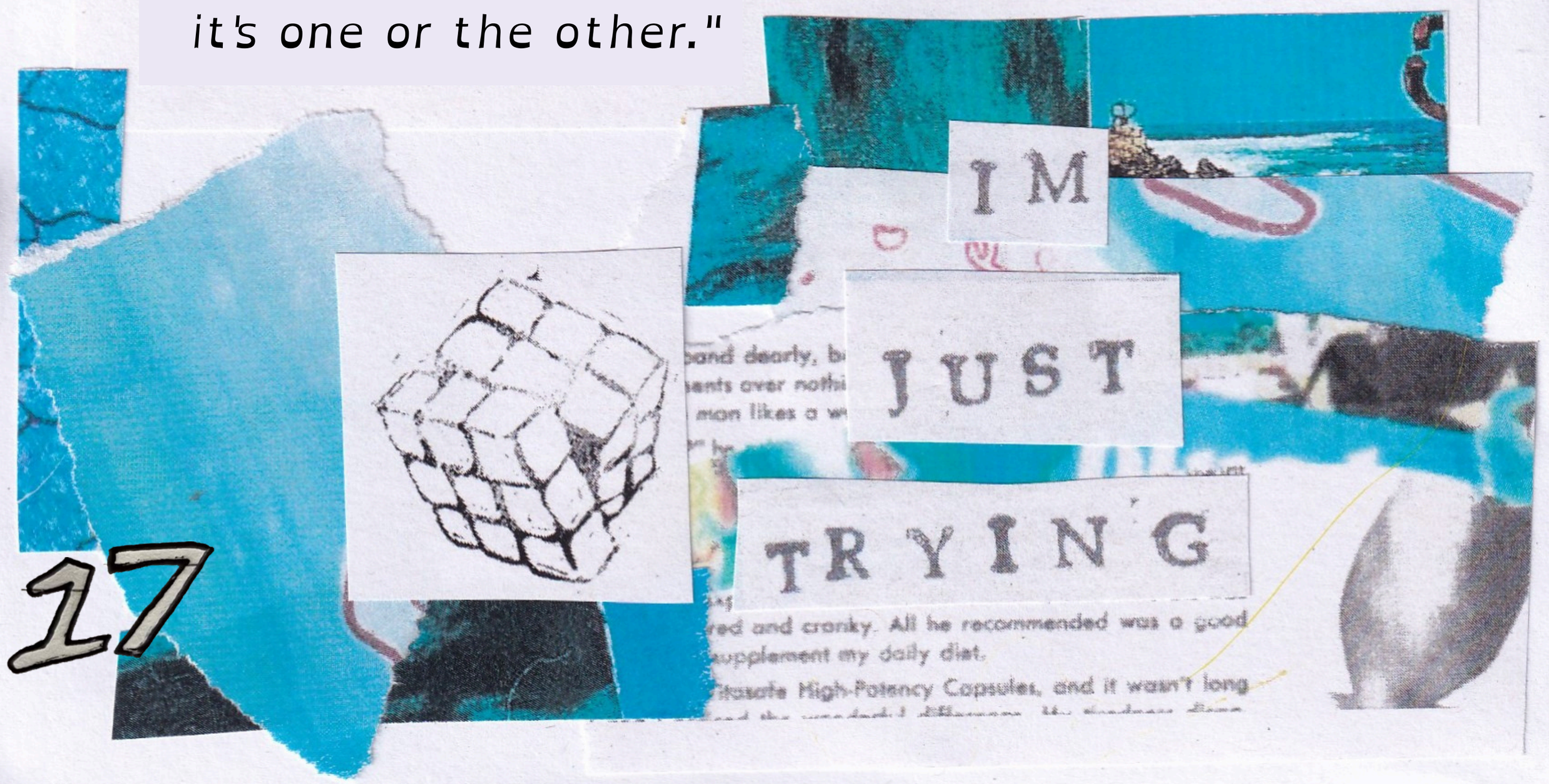
This could mean that you have to adjust to changes within your own gender identity, which can be difficult to manage or predict and can cause distress.

CHANGE WILL COME I know

as sure as
night
returns to
day

It's okay to recognise that change is scary, sit with that feeling, and then continue changing. Change, as scary as it is, is necessary. A great way to help make change less overwhelming is to try and view it as positively as possible.[25] While that's much easier said than done, considering the positives can help to reduce the stress associated with change and the overall experience. For example, it may be distressing to change your name, but you could consider that it could make you feel more comfortable when being addressed by others. As one of our discussion group members highlighted:

- *"Just sitting and breathing and reminding myself that in order to grow, you have to change, and in order to expand your horizons and live and experience new and wonderful things, there has to be change, and that it's essential to life. Everything is changing, all the time. It took me so long to be ok with that, and I kind of wish that someone had told me that "it's gonna happen whether you like it or not. You gotta embrace it or break down, it's one or the other."*



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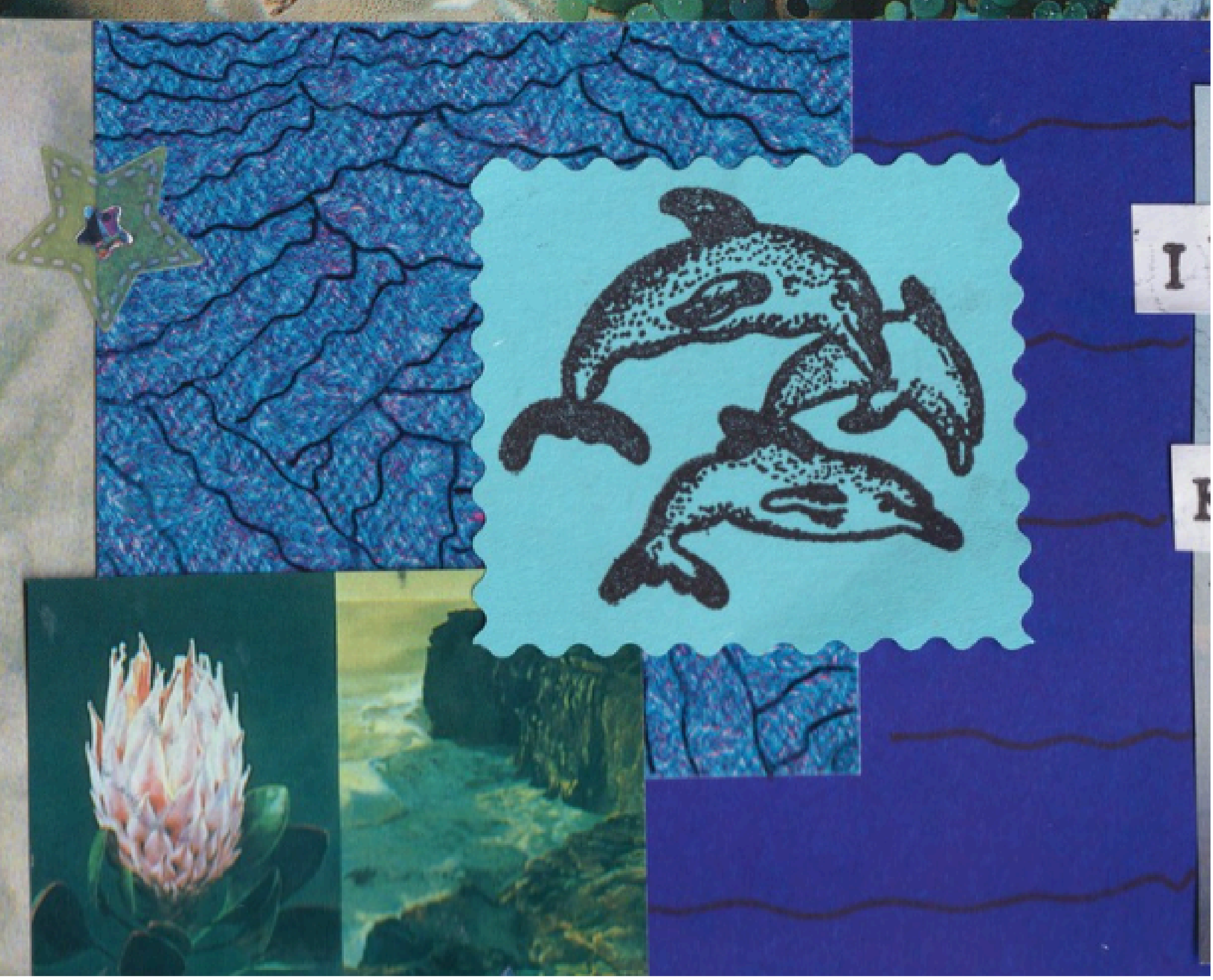
EVERYTHING CHANGES SO QUICKLY



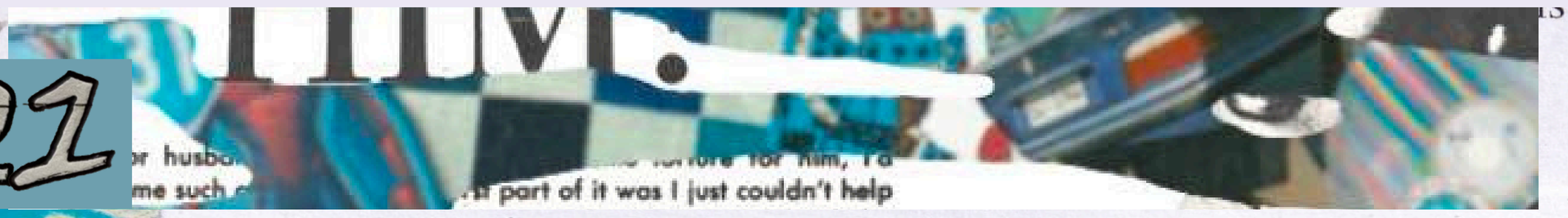
M JUST TRYING TO

KEEP MY HEAD

ABOVE WATER

Whilst change can be distressing, it provides us with important opportunities to learn and grow.[23] There are plenty of ways in which we can cope with change, or make our experiences less stressful. One's ability to cope with change is highly dependent on their understanding of the situation - understanding why something has or will happen can help make a situation less stressful.[24]

Alternative ways you can cope with change are to properly understand and conceptualise it. This can include researching the change, considering how it may apply to you, and what the change may result in. For example, if you are wanting to change your legal documents, you can research the process. You can also try considering how you will feel before, during, and after by describing the situation to yourself and others. This may help you to understand the change and manage expectations more thoroughly. You can include visual supports,[27] such as drawings, YouTube videos, and social media, to properly understand what to expect. Now, whilst it is easy to get overwhelmed, please make sure you are looking after yourself throughout this process and take breaks when necessary.



Torturing Him!

My poor husbo… torture for him, I'd become such … part of it was I just couldn't help … even an afternoon nap didn't help. … as so nervous and irritable I jumped … world he said.

I loved my husband dearly, but instead of being … …ments over nothing at all. I could… on Phil. After all, no man likes a woman ruinin…

"What's wrong?" he… …you ought …

… had the answer. After examining me, he explai… …was merely the result of a prolonged nutritional deficiency. He explained that a lack of vitamins and minerals was actually making me tired and cranky. All he recommended was a good nutritional formula to supplement my daily diet.

I started taking Vitasafe High-Potency Capsules, and it wasn't long before Phil and I noticed the wonderful difference. My tiredness disappeared. I wasn't nervous anymore — and thank goodness I stopped nag-

Other coping strategies include:[28]

- Using comfort objects when moving between situations

- Rewarding yourself for getting through difficult changes

- Allowing yourself 'time out' such as exercise, meditation or a day in bed to recharge

JUGOSLAVIJA
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Joie de vivre. Descr
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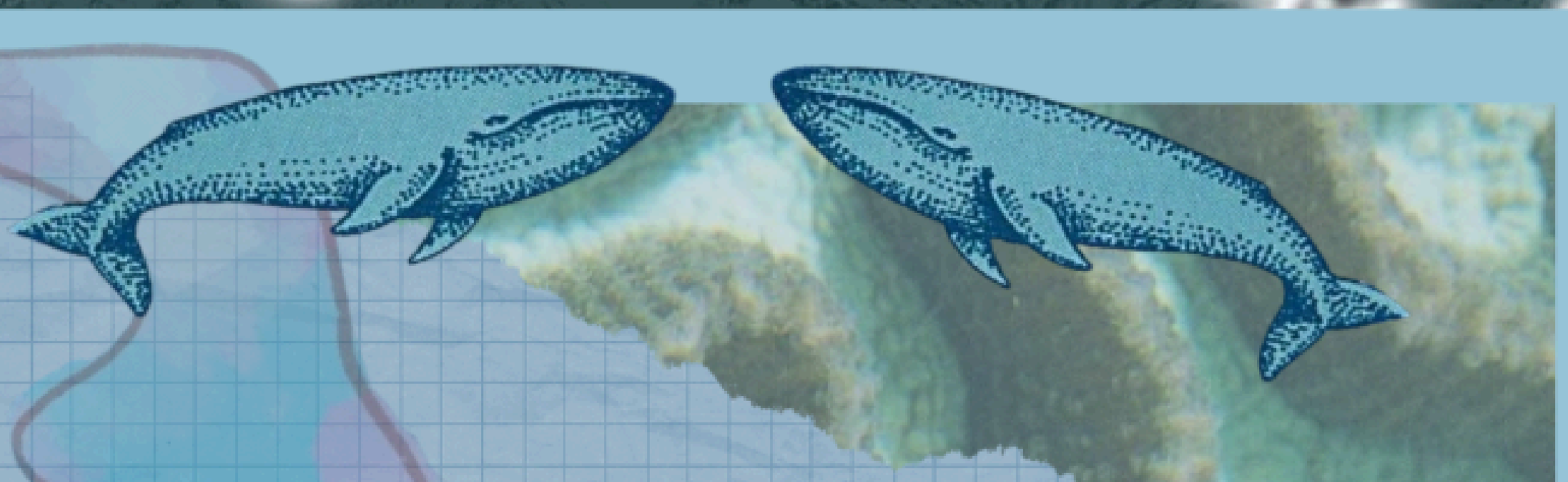
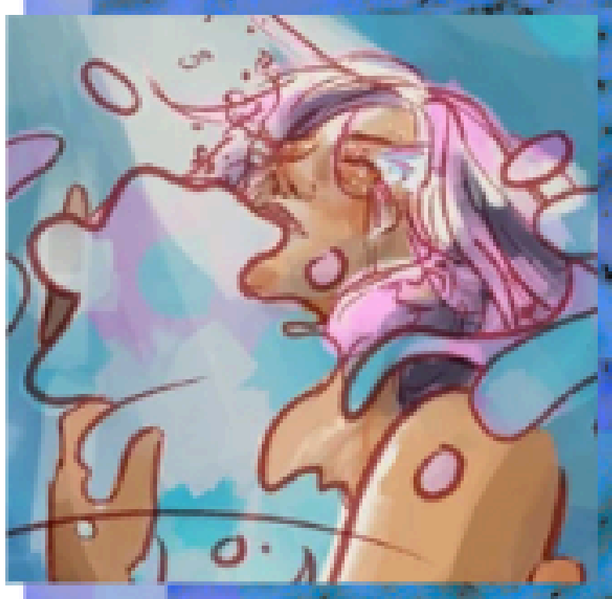


As someone who has transitioned, detransitioned, and retransitioned several times throughout the six years I have identified as transgender, I can assure you that it is okay to adjust your transition as you need. I chose to stop taking testosterone because I decided that, whilst the changes I was experiencing were gender affirming, I couldn't handle the changes at that time.

Self love as a trans Autistic person can mean considering and accommodating both your Autism and your trans identity, and keeping in mind that both identities might need different things. Ultimately, the way you choose to transition, or whether you choose to transition at all, is entirely your choice. There is no wrong way to be trans, the community will embrace and accept you no matter what your trans experience looks like. Remember to be kind to yourself and to accommodate yourself in your transition whenever you can.

with love and spoons,
the Genderbility team

the team

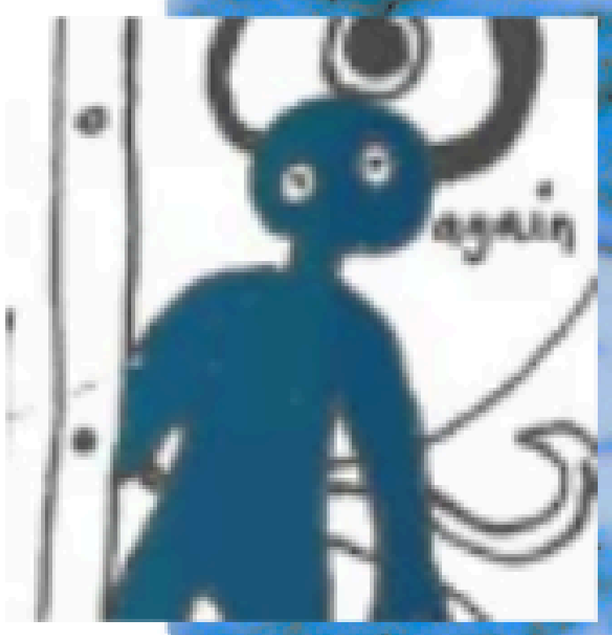


<u>fay (they/them), on Bunurong/Boon Wurrung and Wirundjeri Woi-Wurrung land</u>

queer, Aboriginal, DeafBlind and multipley disabled person, also an HSN autistic. studies a diploma of Auslan, and spends time crafting with various mediums.

<u>ash (he/him), on Yalukit-Willam and Bunurong/Boon Wurrung land</u>

multipley disabled trans man. loves playing with different mediums like lino, gelli-plate, gouache, and anything else he can find. loves to make art about the trans experience.

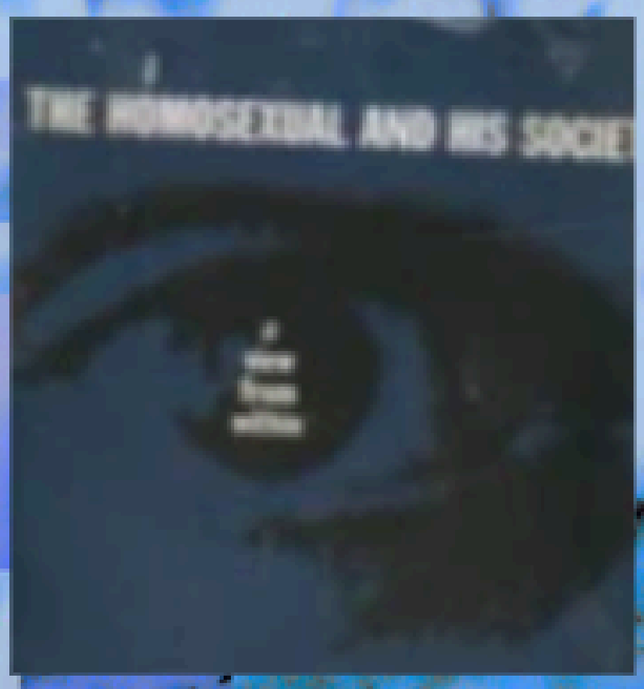


<u>tom (they/them), on Gadigal land</u>

freak concerned with boredom and outsider experiences. neurodivergent and non-binary. has achieved nothing noteworthy. is excited to continue their abstract private work.

<u>kaleb (he/him), on Turrbal and Jagera land</u>

transmasc queer who loves to craft. works for a LGBTQIA+ disability organisation, and small businesses (including his own ;)). likes to use creativity to connect with himself and his gender, makes soft and tender things.



eddie (he/him), on Gadigal land

transmasculine autistic dude, passionate about lived experience advocacy. studying psychology and gender studies to bring more lived experience into the queer psychology field.

x / crash!! (he/him), on Gadigal land

non-binary, a-spec, Autistic lesbian - passionate about maximalism and the liberation of all marginalized peoples, especially trans and autistic people. loves to create lived-experience zines.

zephyr (they/them), on Gadigal land

weird mixed kid who sits on a lot of spectrums. a zine artist and writer who wants to push boundaries of whatever medium they get their hands on.

credits

fay - writer (acknowledgements)
eddie - writer (main article)
x / crash!! - writer (final note)
the entire team - editors and artists

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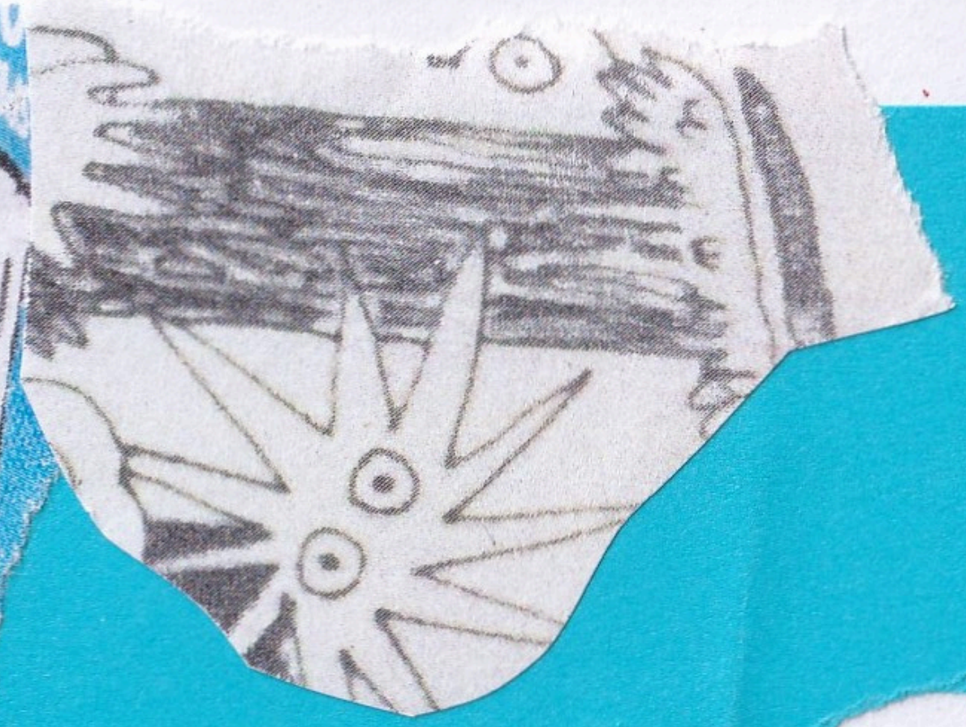
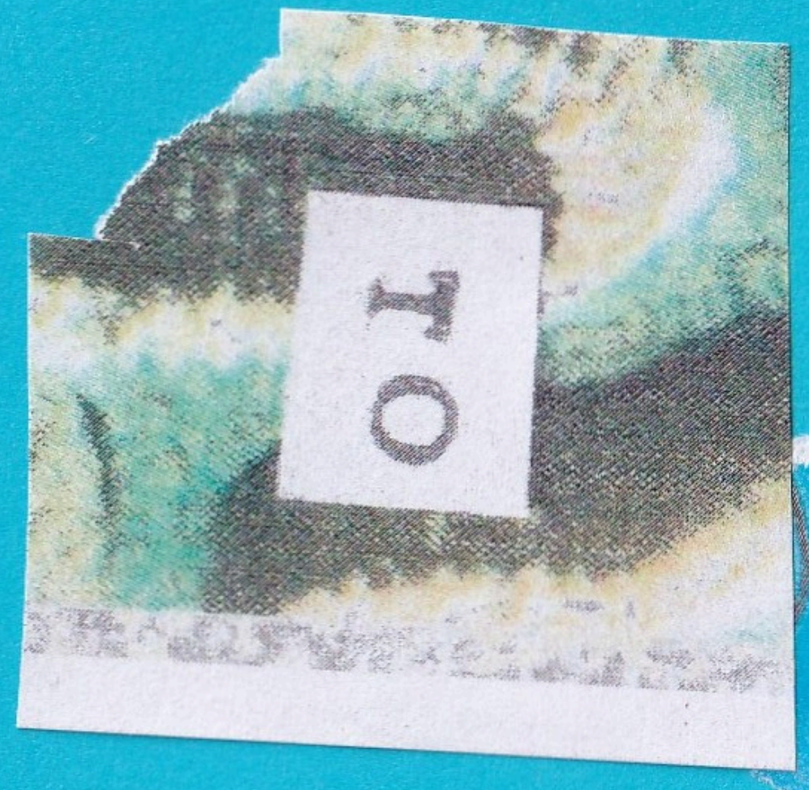


THE
END!

NAS
GUARD
ON
DUTY


TO

BUS